

WALLOON LAKE

by

Dr. W. W. King

When we first came, there was no Walloon Lake. It was Bear Lake. This was the name of the Post Office. Since there was another Bear Lake in the state which caused constant confusion in the mail, the Post Office Department in Washington demanded that the name of the office here should be changed.

Why the name Walloon was chosen has had different explanations. One explanation was that Walloon was the Indian name for bear, which of course is not true. The true reason for selecting the name Walloon, I am quite sure, was this; In the very early days of this North Country, a few families of Belgians settled on the West Arm of the lake. They were from the Walloon Province of Belgium. They did not remain long, and about the time the name of the Post Office was to be changed, someone found a sign board where the Belgians had lived bearing the name Walloon, the province from which they had come. And since it was rather odd, and at the same time rather musical and pleasing, Bear Lake got its name Walloon.

Thus the name of a Province in Belgium is perpetuated in Michigan. I got this information from Alfred Haas, whose family was among the early settlers of this region. As I remember the story, Alfred's father was the one who found the sign board. Fiction? Legend? I think not.

Fifty seven years ago things were rather primitive and crude at the lake. People coming by train--the only way they could come then--landed at Clarion and were driven over, with their baggage, by wagon. The Marjorerns and the Bixbys furnished the transportation, meeting all trains.

This was before the days of automobiles or gasoline engines. Therefore there was no such thing as a motor boat on the lake. All lake travel was by row boats and canoes, except there were two steam boats. The larger one was the Tourist, and the smaller one the Outing. The Tourist would accommodate thirty or forty people, and they each made one or more round trips each day to the West end of the lake, a distance of approximately twelve miles each way. They used wood burning engines, and sparks and sometimes flames would pour out of the smoke stack. Occasionally a woman passenger who stuck her head out too far on the side, would find her hat on fire from the sparks, but there were never any claims for damages.

When we first came to the lake, there was a situation here that is hard to believe now could have been true. One man controlled the waters of the lake and used them to suit his own convenience, without a record to the interests of anybody else. A Mr. McManus had a saw-mill in Petoskey on Bear River. He desired to float saw logs down the river to his mill. The river itself was too shallow for this. So he arranged a temporary, moveable dam at the outlet of the

lake. He would put his dam in, raise the level of the lake two or three feet, then remove the dam, flood the river, and float his logs down to his mill.

One can easily see what happened to those with cottages on the lake. One week their docks would be afloat, and the next week they would be on dry ground. When a committee went to see him to make protest, he refused to change his method of using the lake. The matter was taken to court, and the court by the testimony of old residents, established the natural level of the lake, and issued a permanent injunction against any one ever interfering with that level. Hard to believe that such a thing was possible and would be tolerated? But I happen to be one of those who had a part in getting an impossible situation cured.

There are so many interesting things about those early days that I could speak of, but time and space forbid. There are some tales I could tell that you would hardly believe and others "whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul". But please bear with me when I say this closing word.

I have seen the lake regions of Minnesota and Wisconsin, and many other lakes in Michigan, but there is no lake more beautiful in every way than Walloon. Surrounded on all sides by forested hills, the forests coming down to the water's edge, fed entirely by springs that give the cleanest, sweetest water; while sandy shores and bottom, with very little muckland anywhere, with a diversified and attractive shore line, changing

at every turn into arms and bays and coves; and with the finest people who came here and who live here whom it is a joy to meet and to know. This is beautiful Walloon. And do you know that while the West end of the lake is within a mile of Lake Michigan, it is 102 feet higher than Lake Michigan?

Information taken from Vol. III, No. 9 October, 1955